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Editorial

Whose side is EPA on, the citizens' or Rockford Blacktop's?

By Frank Schier
Editor and Publisher

Last Wednesday, more than 50 unhappy people gathered in a Howard Johnson's meeting room. The U.S. EPA was holding a hearing on a proposed plan to modify the remedy of the Superfund site at Pagel's Pit, Winnebago County's landfill.

As Bernie Schorle, the EPA's remedial project manager, proceeded with his presentation, the dismay of local business owners and residents grew.

Schorle's thorough presentation made two things clear: 1. The adjacent Acme Solvent Superfund site is still leaking into Pagel's Pit. 2. Pagel's Pit itself still leaks.

According to a map of the groundwater monitoring network Schorle distributed, the groundwater moves to the northwest to affect Kilbuck Creek and the Rock River.

A resident to the west of the pit, Alex Borchardt, said when he bought his home five years ago, his well tests were fine. The test on his well one year ago found the water dangerous to consume. He said a neighbor had similar problems and had problems selling the property.

Local farmers complained of a fish kill in Kilbuck Creek and the lack of EPA response as to the effect on his livestock.

Restaurant owner Frank Manzullo said, "We have the BFI pit, Rockford's sludge, Acme Solvent, and Pagel's Pit. If 80 percent of the area's growth is going to the northwest around Rockton and Roscoe, why don't we put a dump up there? This started as a gravel pit, and now it's Mount Rainier." He was also angry about the Chicago garbage being trucked into the BFI pit at a heavy rate.

Other residents confirmed and applauded Dean Ekberg's account of when a ravine on the pit caught fire. They all complained that the 12-alarm fire was passed over in the local media. Ekberg, echoed by others, said the leachate springs all around the base of the pit's slope release significant amounts of nitrate and ammonia. "Bring your noseplugs" if you drive around that base, said another resident.

Rockford Blacktop, as the operator of Pagel's Pit, was given the responsibility to carry out the 1991 Record of Decision. The most effective and speedy way to fulfill those requirements is to pump and treat the leachate. That method is also the most expensive. Money talks, and the EPA seems to be listening.

The EPA proposes not requiring pumping and treating as part of the new remediation. This is outrageous. Schorle noted that one third of the landfill was now capped; however, the remaining two thirds remains uncapped, and trucks still dump garbage and

sludge everyday, supposedly for another two years. By the way, expanding the pit has already been approved by the county. This "no action" EPA stance applies to the expansion of Pagel's Pit as well! Keep on dumpin'!

Amazingly, Pagel's Pit is one of the very few of the 1200 Superfund sites on EPA's

1986 National Priority List still operating. Schorle admitted that the situation is "somewhat unique in that regard." Close the dump.

What is also "somewhat unique" is the county's proposed prison site in the area, despite widespread opposition. The prison's 800-foot well would have a draw-down effect on the groundwater from the Acme and Pagel's Pit Superfund sites. Could the push for the prison and letting Blacktop off the EPA hook be related—no EPA equals an OK prison well? But then, what of the Acme site?

Even capping the entire pit and simple monitoring will never solve this problem for future land use in the area, not to mention the people who live there.

The EPA seems too ready to grant Rockford Blacktop all the changes the firm wants

in the 1991 Record of Decision. What of the changes. Kilbuck Creek, the Rock River and people in the area will suffer? This sentiment was clear during the meeting: "If you're our EPA, why aren't you protecting us?" Good question.

Many people complained about the short notice for the meeting and that no one knew about it. Gordie Blum, the EPA Community Involvement Coordinator, said he took a quarter page ad on the editorial page of the local daily.

To Schorle and Blum's credit, they agreed to have another public hearing Wednesday, September 8th, 7 p.m., at Mancuso's Village Center, 7358 Rydberg Road in New Millford. That's the kind of response our EPA should always have.